

# MacArthur, Inchon and the Art of Battle Command

Major Jeffery A. Bradford, US Army

On 25 June 1950, the North Korean People's Army (NKPA) attacked South Korea to reunite the peninsula under Communist control.<sup>1</sup> The South Korean Army, severely beaten, retreated under the onslaught. US Army General Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander Allied Powers (Far East Command), journeyed from Japan to Korea on 29 June to observe the situation personally.<sup>2</sup>

Standing on the banks of the Han River in Seoul, MacArthur watched remnants of a defeated and disorganized South Korean Army mix with thousands of refugees plodding south, leaving Seoul to the North Korean invaders. To reverse this defeat, MacArthur formulated a plan to seize the initiative from the North Koreans. Although he faced overwhelming odds, he would rely on strategic maneuver to cut enemy supply lines, which had to run through Seoul.<sup>3</sup> To recapture Seoul and surprise the NKPA before it could mass against his forces, he would have to land nearby. The place he chose was Inchon, the closest port to Seoul.

Operation *Chromite*, the landing at Inchon, was the greatest amphibious turning movement in recorded history. On 15 September 1950, the US 1st Marine Division and the 7th Infantry Division (ID), under the US X Corps, stormed the beaches at Inchon Harbor. Moving inland, they recaptured Seoul and cut NKPA lines of communications leading to the Pusan Perimeter. Simultaneously, the US 8th Army began its breakout from the perimeter. These surprising strokes, from a brilliant military mind, effectively destroyed the NKPA.

The events leading up to the landing illustrate MacArthur's mastery of the art of battle command. His use and understanding of battle command tenets and dynamics helped him visualize an end state, then convince, lead and motivate other US leaders to commit to the operation. If MacArthur had been unable to convince US leaders to conduct the op-

eration, the Korean War's outcome could have been decidedly different.

## Battle Command

Battle command, a relatively new term to Army doctrine, first appeared in the June 1993 version of Field Manual (FM) 100-5, *Operations*, where it replaced command and control (C<sup>2</sup>) as one of the combat functions.<sup>4</sup> Although battle command has been practiced throughout history, as a separate combat function it has received little exposure, probably because it is a dynamic process.<sup>5</sup>

The battle command concept expands C<sup>2</sup> concepts and addresses individuals and their roles in fighting. As opposed to just thinking about command (decision making and leading) and control (staffs, communications, battle drills and standing operating procedures), battle command stresses commanders' skills and abilities.

Battle command is the art of battle decision making and leading and motivating soldiers and their organizations into action to accomplish missions and includes:

- Visualizing current and future states.
- Formulating operational concepts to get from one to the other at the least cost.
- Assigning missions.
- Prioritizing and allocating resources.
- Selecting the critical time and place to act.
- Knowing how and when to make adjustments during the fight.<sup>6</sup>

The successful battle commander must operate according to certain tenets and dynamics. Understanding and applying them to his situation is critical.<sup>7</sup>

**Tenets.** A tenet is a basic truth held by an organization. A battle commander's success on and off the battlefield depends on his ability to operate according to battle command tenets: initiative, agility, depth, integration, versatility, flexibility,

judgment, intuition and empathy.<sup>8</sup>

**Initiative** implies the offensive spirit, setting or changing the terms of battle by action or decision, and depletes enemy options while still having friendly options. **Agility** is the commander's ability to react more quickly than the opponent. **Depth** is fighting the enemy throughout the enemy disposition with fires and attacks on his flanks and rear. **Integration** means achieving mass at the decisive point, time and place on the battlefield. The commander displays **versatility** by meeting diverse requirements. **Flexibility** allows the commander to adapt his decision-making process and leadership style to different situations.

**Judgment** is the process of forming an accurate opinion or estimate based on available information. Judgment is required for selecting the critical time and place to act, assigning missions, prioritizing, assessing risk, allocating resources and leading. Thorough knowledge of the science of warfighting, a strong ethical sense and understanding of enemy and friendly capabilities form the basis of a battle commander's judgment.

**Intuition** is the ability to look at a situation and see immediately its important aspects. Intuition is born from a commander's experiences and allows him to read the battle more quickly than the enemy can, then react decisively to defeat him. This tenet contributes to initiative and agility.

**Empathy** is being aware of and sensitive to soldiers' experiences, thoughts and feelings. One of MacArthur's reasons for pursuing a landing at Inchon was his empathy for the soldier in the field. He knew that ultimately the attack would save lives.<sup>9</sup>

**Dynamics.** Battle-command dynamics, the mastery or misunderstanding of which can have dire consequences, determine the effectiveness of the commander's plan. The six dynamics are leadership,

decision making, information assimilation, visualization, conceptualization and communication.<sup>10</sup>

*Leadership* includes being competent and confident; inspiring soldiers with the will to win; providing purpose, direction and motivation; inspiring and directing assigned forces and resources to a purposeful end; and providing vision of future courses of action.<sup>11</sup>

*Decision making* is knowing whether to decide and when and what to decide. It also includes knowing the decision's consequences, anticipating outcomes and providing vision for future courses of action.<sup>12</sup>

*Information assimilation* involves filtering and absorbing available information, then thoroughly comprehending what is important. It is the first step to visualizing the situation. *Visualization* is the act of forming a mental picture of current and future states based on intuition, available information and the higher commander's intent. The commander forms the situation estimate based on seeing enemy forces, friendly forces and terrain in terms of time, space and purpose. From his visualization, he develops his *concept* of the operation.

*Communication* links information to decisions and decisions to actions.<sup>13</sup> A battle commander who cannot communicate intent effectively cannot accomplish the mission; subordinates will not know what is expected.

### Planning the Operation

MacArthur's vision of the Inchon landing was based on available information and his own intuition. He assessed the current state quickly, realizing that the South Koreans were beaten and that the peninsula was in danger of being overrun.

MacArthur knew US forces needed to get to the peninsula to stem the advancing NKPA. German military strategist Carl von Clausewitz called this insight *coup d'oeil*—"the quick recognition of a truth that the mind would ordinarily miss or would perceive only after long study and reflection."<sup>14</sup> MacArthur also visualized the future state, which was the NKPA's defeat and South Korea's restoration. To wrest initiative from

the enemy, he knew he needed to capitalize on strategic maneuver the nearby sea afforded.

MacArthur knew—through intuition and experience—that he would have to attack a weak point in the NKPA's flank or rear. His forces, outnumbered three to one, could seize the initiative and assume the offensive by forcing the enemy to fight in two directions simultaneously.<sup>15</sup>

MacArthur's philosophy on combat was simple and direct: "It doesn't matter how much you have, so long as you fight with what you have. It doesn't matter where you fight, so long as you fight. Because where you fight, the enemy has to fight too, and even though it splits your force, it must split his force also. So fight, on whatever the scale, whenever and wherever you can. There is only one way to win victories. Attack, attack, attack!"<sup>16</sup>

It is important for commanders today to develop the ability to visualize the current state or situation and develop how they want the future state to look. In all operations, especially defensive ones, commanders must continuously think about how to seize the initiative. Commanders should remember past lessons and use them to visualize the battlefield. MacArthur excelled in these aspects.

### Overcoming Opposition

MacArthur reasoned that the United States would mobilize its full military might to defeat the enemy; he was mistaken. With the Cold War's advent, the military priority was Europe, and Korea was just a sideshow.

MacArthur asked for five additional divisions, telling the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) that he did not have enough force to "give sufficient latitude for efficient operation [or to] satisfy the basic requirement" to stop the North Korean advance. He was given only a regimental combat team (RCT) and had to continue fighting with what he had.<sup>17</sup>

MacArthur displayed flexibility when, to beef up his force, he instituted the "buddy system," now known as the Korean Augmentee to the United States Army (KATUSA) program, which assigned each US soldier a Republic of Korea (ROK)

soldier to fight beside him. The program raised MacArthur's effective combat power dramatically.<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, MacArthur continued to pressure the JCS, and eventually he began receiving units.

On 2 July, MacArthur and his staff prepared for the 22 July amphibious turning movement at Inchon—Operation *Bluehearts*. The action was to involve the 1st Cavalry Division and a Marine Corps RCT. However, the plan was scrapped because the 1st Cavalry Division was committed to halting the North Korean advance, and the RCT would not arrive in country until the beginning of August.<sup>19</sup>

MacArthur continued planning an amphibious landing, setting the date for 15 September. The 2d ID and the 5th Marine RCT would form the assault force of the operation renamed *Chromite*.<sup>20</sup>

On 13 July, General Joe Collins and General Hoyt Vandenberg, the Army and Air Force Chiefs of Staff and Admiral Arthur W. Radford, Commander in Chief, Pacific, visited MacArthur in Japan. Collins related JCS concerns about the Inchon landing, telling MacArthur that he would have to win the war with available troops. MacArthur told Collins, "Joe, you are going to have to change your mind."<sup>21</sup> Collins changed his mind, and he and Radford agreed to send the 1st Marine Division immediately to Korea.

Effective, persuasive communication is important to a battle commander but is sometimes lacking. FM 22-100, *Leadership*, states that well-developed persuasion skills and openness to working through controversy in a positive way help leaders overcome resistance and build support and are especially important when working with other leaders.<sup>22</sup>

MacArthur, a master communicator, considered communication vital to successful battle command. He told a former staff member, who was teaching English at West Point, that without communication "a man may have the finest judgment in the world, he may be even wise as Solomon, yet his influence will be practically negligible. There must be a logical connection between the thought in a man's brain and the abil-

ity to present it in clear language."<sup>23</sup>

In 1941, in describing MacArthur's speaking ability, *Time* magazine wrote: "He would stride up and down in his office, purpling the air with oratory, punctuated with invocations of God, the flag and patriotism, pounding his fist in his palm, swinging his arms in sweeping gesture. In conversation he was not much different, changing at will from a mellifluous melodramatic whisper to a fiery snort, from brutal fact to sheer *rodomontade*, using phrases like, 'We must foil the enemy'; 'We must stand on the eve of the great battle'; 'We must not spill our precious blood on foreign soil in vain'."<sup>24</sup>

In Korea, MacArthur kept his plan alive by effectively communicating his intent and the operation's benefits to the JCS. Once they returned to the States, however, support again began to wane.

MacArthur wired Washington on 23 July, giving the JCS his operational concept. He had planned for a two-division corps, whose amphibious landing in the enemy's rear would envelop and destroy it as the US 8th Army attacked from the south. This operation would cut the enemy's lines of communication and give friendly forces a decisive victory. The alternative was a bloody, indecisive frontal attack.<sup>25</sup>

Shortly after the 2d ID and 5th Marine RCT arrived in theater, MacArthur committed them to the Pusan Perimeter defense; his plan was on hold again. However, with the reinforcements' arrival, the 8th Army stopped the NKPA advance and established the Pusan Perimeter. MacArthur could now put Operation *Chromite* into action. But, again, he faced unexpected opposition. The JCS, under Chairman General Omar Bradley, thought MacArthur's amphibious operation had been deemed impractical and laid aside.<sup>26</sup> To keep the plan alive, MacArthur put his masterful communication skills to the test.

On 23 August, MacArthur convened a strategic planning conference to determine Korea's fate. When Collins and Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Forrest Sherman arrived, MacArthur immediately surmised they had come to talk him out

of the operation.<sup>27</sup> He could not order Collins and Sherman to agree with him, but if they did not, his attack plan for 15 September would be in jeopardy. His window of opportunity would close forever.

The operation's critics spoke of the many problems involved with landing at Inchon: the channel was too narrow; the tides were not right; the beaches were not good; MacArthur would have to pull forces from the Pusan Perimeter to assault Inchon; Inchon was too far from the 8th Army; Kunsan was a better place to land and link up with the 8th Army.<sup>28</sup>

In his rebuttal, MacArthur said, "The bulk of the Reds are committed around Walker's defense perimeter. The enemy, I am convinced, has failed to prepare Inchon properly for defense. The very arguments you have made as to the impracticabilities involved will tend to ensure for me the element of surprise, for the enemy commander will reason that no one would be so brash as to make such an attempt. Surprise is the most vital element of success in war."

"The Navy's objections as to tides, hydrography, terrain and physical handicaps are indeed substantial and pertinent. But they are not insuperable. My confidence in the Navy is complete, and in fact, I seem to have more confidence in the Navy than the Navy itself. The Navy's rich experience in staging the numerous amphibious landings under my command in the Pacific during the late war, frequently under somewhat similar difficulties, leaves me with little doubt on that score."

"As to the proposal for a landing at Kunsan, it would indeed eliminate many of the hazards of Inchon, but it would largely be ineffective and indecisive. . . . It would be a 'short envelopment,' and nothing in war is more futile. Better no flank movements than one such as this. The only result would be to hook up with [General Walton Harris] Walker's troops on his left. It would be better to send the troops directly to Walker than by such an indirect and costly process."

"But [seizing] Inchon and Seoul will cut the enemy's supply line and seal off the entire southern penin-

sula. The [enemy's vulnerability] is his supply position. . . . [B]y seizing Seoul I would completely paralyze the enemy's supply system—coming and going."

"The only alternative to a stroke such as I propose will be the continuation of the savage sacrifice we are making at Pusan, with no hope of relief in sight. Are you content to let our troops stay in that bloody perimeter like beef cattle in the slaughterhouse? Who will take the responsibility for such a tragedy? Certainly, I will not. . . . We must act now or we will die. . . . If my estimate is inaccurate. . . , I will be there personally and will immediately withdraw our forces before they are committed to a bloody setback. The only loss then will be my professional reputation. But Inchon will not fail. Inchon will succeed. And it will save 100,000 lives."<sup>29</sup>

MacArthur's confident, persuasive speech showed great empathy. He could have severely chastised and ridiculed the generals and admirals for their lack of vision, but he did not. He understood ground soldiers' plight and wanted to prevent their slaughter.

MacArthur's confidence in the operation was paramount. He staked his military reputation on the outcome. He showed understanding of the tenet of depth and what he could accomplish by using it. A lack of depth in the turning movement, by attacking at Kunsan, would have provided no benefit. To him, it was Inchon or nothing. On 29 August, the JCS approved MacArthur's plan.

MacArthur's judgment in prioritizing and allocating resources to secure the Pusan Perimeter and ensure sufficient forces for the Inchon landing was critical. He reassigned units as needed to conduct the assault. The 7th ID, still in Japan, would replace the 2d ID. The 2d ID was still heavily engaged in the Pusan perimeter defense. MacArthur withdrew the 5th Marine RCT from the perimeter and used it in the assault with the rest of the 1st Marine division. The 7th ID RCT, off the coast near Pusan, would rush in to fill any gaps the 5th Marines created. If the 7th ID RCT were not needed on the Pusan perimeter, it would be the last



element to land at Inchon.<sup>30</sup>

One week before the operation, MacArthur received a message from the JCS doubting the operation's validity and questioning whether it should be abandoned. MacArthur was thunderstruck. Who could have doubts at this last moment? He immediately replied: "I regard the [operation's] chance of success . . . as excellent. I go further in belief that it represents the only hope of wresting the initiative from the enemy and thereby presenting the opportunity for a decisive blow. . . . There is not the slightest possibility, however, of our forces being ejected from the Pusan beachhead . . . , preparations are proceeding according to schedule. I repeat that I, and all of my commanders and staff officers, without exception, are enthusiastic for and confident of the [enveloping movement's] success."<sup>31</sup>

MacArthur never forgot the need to regain the initiative from the enemy. He kept stressing this point. In hindsight, his judgment was correct. His confidence helped convince President Harry S. Truman and the JCS that the operation could succeed.

MacArthur's confident leadership during this critical time is perhaps his greatest achievement. When others were wilting under the situation's magnitude, MacArthur stood firm in his judgment that the operation would succeed. By emphasizing the operation's major points, he convinced the JCS that his way was best.

On 15 September 1950, MacArthur led the operation to success.<sup>32</sup> His judgment in determining the critical time and place to act and his ability to integrate joint forces in a decisive blow testified to his greatness as a battle commander.

#### NOTES

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2. *Ibid.*, 332.
3. *Ibid.*, 333.
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5. Battle Command Battle Laboratory Pamphlet 2.1, *Battle Command Handbook* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Battle Command Battle Laboratory, 22 February 1993), online at <<http://cacfs.army.mil/index1.htm>> dated 13 January 2000, vi.
6. *Ibid.*, 1-2.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*, 1-3.
9. Howard K. Brewington, "Battle Command Slide Presentation," slides 5 through 13, 1998.
10. *Battle Command Handbook*, 1-3.
11. FM 100-5, 2-15.
12. *Ibid.*, 2-14.
13. Brewington, slides 15 through 20.

14. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 102.
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16. Edgar F. Puryear Jr., *Nineteen Stars: A Study in Military Character and Leadership* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1981), 127.
17. Clayton D. James, *The Years of MacArthur*, vol III, *Triumph and Disaster, 1945-1964* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1985), 430.
18. William Manchester, *American Caesar: Douglas MacArthur 1880-1964* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1978), 559.
19. James, 465.
20. *Ibid.*
21. Manchester, 573.
22. FM 22-100, *Leadership* (Washington, DC: GPO, June 1999), 6-3.
23. Puryear, 147.
24. *Ibid.*, 145.
25. MacArthur, 346.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*, 347.
28. *Ibid.*, 349.
29. *Ibid.*, 350.
30. *Ibid.*, 351.
31. *Ibid.*, 352.
32. S.L. Mayer, *The Biography of General of the Army Douglas MacArthur* (Northbrook, IL: Book Value International, 1961), 128.

*Major Jeffrey A. Bradford, US Army, is attending the School for Advanced Military Studies, Fort Leavenworth. He received a B.S. from the US Military Academy, an M.P.A. from the University of Oklahoma and graduated from the Command and General Staff College (CSGC). He has served in various command and staff positions in the Continental United States and Korea. This essay is the Third Place Winner of CGSC's 1999-2000 MacArthur Writing Contest.*

## MR Insights

### Thinking Inside the Box: AC/RC Teaming Lieutenant Colonel Anthony Formica, US Army National Guard

Before stepping into the brigade commander's tent for the operation order (OPORD) brief, Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Steve Hogan, commander of the 4-324th Infantry, took one last look at the starry sky over Rajasthan. Moving into the crowded tactical operations center (TOC), he nodded at acquaintances and friends on the staff, then sat dead center on the front row to get the best look at the situation maps.

Hogan listened as the brigade S2 provided the background information for the upcoming mission: "As you are aware, the United States, in support of United Nations (UN) resolutions, has provided the 2d Brigade, 11th Infantry Division, Light, as part

of a stability and support operation in the Republic of Rajasthan, a former Soviet central-Asian republic. Recent economic and religious instability has caused the government coalition to collapse, and the military has split along factional lines. This brigade, the lead element of the UN force, deployed to an intermediate staging base (ISB) near Plovda airfield, a former Soviet air base approximately 80 kilometers from the capital city of Tamarkand."

"That was a week ago," thought Hogan. "What next?"

Hogan perked up when he heard the intelligence officer's next comment: "We have confirmed that the 54th Rajasthan Motorized Rifle Bri-

gade, with elements of a tank battalion, has linked up with rebel forces in Tamarkand. We expect them to move down Highway 1 to seize Al Sharif within 24 hours." Al Sharif was a road junction about 50 kilometers from Plovda on the main road to Tamarkand.

The brigade S3 began his brief: "The 2d Brigade will deploy one battalion within 12 hours to Al Sharif and secure routes to the ISB and prevent enemy armor from disrupting airfield operations. This battalion will be prepared to defend not later than (NLT) 0600 tomorrow."

"That's about 11 hours from now," thought Hogan. "Someone's going to move 30 miles, then set up